DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 238 CS 211 225

AUTHOR Stewart, Robert K.
TITLE When People See News from a Non-Western Perspective: Cable News Network's "World Report."
PUB DATE Jul 88
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (71st, Portland, OR, July 2-5, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Broadcast Television; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Context; Foreign Countries; Foreign Policy; Higher Education; Intercultural Communication; International Relations; Mass Media Effects; *News Media; *News Reporting; *Non Western Civilization; Western Civilization; World Affairs; World Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Cable News Network; International Communication; Journalists; *New International Economic Order; United States

ABSTRACT

Much of what Americans "see" of the world is focused through the prism of the American news media. Broadcast journalists, in particular, provide the images that help shape viewers' ideas of the world. The recent introduction on U.S. television of Cable News Network's (CNN) "World Report" now provides the opportunity for American viewers to watch newscasts from other countries. The access to broadcast news stories produced by non-American journalists can affect Americans' world view. Subjects, approximately 85 undergraduates from a journalism class at Ohio University (divided into control and experimental groups), viewed a "constructed" 30 minute segment of CNN "World Report." They were presented with nine assertions which would reflect the individual respondent's world view. The control group was asked the questions prior to viewing the tape. Findings indicate that the views that appear most likely to change when an alternative view is presented are in the area of basic perceptions, i.e. the Soviets seem a little less evil, leaders of developing countries seem less suppressive, the United States seems a little less at the center of the universe, etc. They also suggest that even a brief encounter with news from a non-western perspective can have a dramatic effect on a person's world view. (One note and two tables of data are included, and 11 references and a news questionnaire are appended.) (MS)

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When People See News from a Non-Western Perspective:

Cable News Network's "World Report"

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by

Robert K. Stewart
E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701
(614) 593-2601

Abstract

This research examines the impact that viewing broadcast news stories produced by non-American journalists can have on American college students' views of the world. Much of what Americans "see" of the world is focused by American news media. Broadcast journalists, in particular, provide the images that help shape viewers' images of the world. Until recently, the American TV audience has had little choice, insofar as newscasts from other countries were not shown on television in the U.S. The introduction of "World Report" by CNN has changed that. The question is, now that American viewers have access to broadcast news stories produced by non-American journalists, what effect might it have on our world view?

To answer this question, the author showed thirty minutes of material, "constructed" from ten weeks of "World Report" programs, to American college students. After viewing the stories, the respondents indicated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with nine separate assertions about the world, and the U.S. position in relation to the world. Their responses were compared to similar data from a control group, comprised of students who responded to the assertions before viewing the "World Report" stories. The findings of this study indicate that viewing broadcast news stories produced by non-American journalists can significantly change a person's world view in a number of respects.

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Portland, 1988

CS211225

I. Introduction.

For more than a decade an enormous volume of research has examined two aspects of communication across national boundaries: the extent and direction of communication "flow," and the impact of such communication. In addition to "effects," a principal concern of scholars in this area has been the issue of "power": by whom, to whom, and for whom, does communication flow across international boundaries? In other words, who initiates the communication? Who is the recipient? The beneficiary? (Fejes, 1984)

Researchers examining international communication in terms of "power" usually conclude that western countries, particularly the United States, dominate international communication (see Abel et al., 1984; Eek, 1978; Schiller, 1971; 1980; Nordendstreng, 1974; Schiller and Nordenstreng, 1978). Western news and entertainment interests controlled their respective industries, exporting western values and culture to the rest of the world. The order of power was clear, according to this view: western countries generate most communication that occurs in the international market, export it to non-western nations, and derive financial (and political) benefits thereof. But the challenge to the existing order was not long in coming, as colonies became nations, and the newly formed nations learned of a kind of power in their own not insignificant numbers, and a commonality of interests.

Clearly, a common goal of the newly-emerging nations was, and continues to be, economic development. Early on, a call went up for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), whereby western nations, once enriched by their colonies, gave back a portion of what had been extracted in during the colonial period. Perhaps the most critical piece of the puzzle, according to the new nations, was communication.

People in the west (who controlled the public purse strings in their nations by means of their vote) learned of other people in the world vis-a-vis western news media, and thus with a western spin. The theory goes that, since the western news media are prone to report only the "bad" and not the "good," western people only learn of the corrupt officials in the developing world, of the mudslides that claim the lives of tens of hundreds of South Americans, and so on. In response, a philosophical--and frequently political--position has evolved that calls for a so-called New International Information Order (NIIO) (see Aggarwala, 1982; M'Bow, 1980; Masmoudi, 1984).

The purpose of the NIIO was, and is, to develop channels whereby non-western nations can initiate international communication, directed at a western (or perhaps a another non-western) audience, for the purpose of presenting a picture of the world from other than a western perspective. The theory is, if people in the west knew as much about the successes of peoples and governments of non-western nations as they did the short-comings,

the western nations' willingness to support the NIEO might be realized.

II. A new communication development: CNN's "World Report"

In 1987 Ted Turner's Cable News Network initiated yet another of the media-mogul's ventures, called "World Report." The concept was simple: invite the nearly two-hundred nations of the world to submit news stories on a regular basis, which, when assembled (but not edited) by CNN, become its weekly "World Report." The program would last up to two hours, "airing" Sundays at midnight (eastern time) on CNN in the U.S., and would be available to all participating nations to be used in part or in its entirety.

CNN televised its first "World Report" October 26 (October 25, Central/Pacific time), 1987, with reports from about thirty countries.[1] In the following three programs (November 2, 9 and 16, Eastern time), the number of countries submitting packages ranged from nearly two dozen to about thirty. In all, packages from about forty-five nations (and United Nations TV) were shown on CNN "World Report" during its first month.

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[1]The countries include: Antigua/Barbuda, Aruba, Australia, Bermuda, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Colombia, Cuba, Curacao, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, Grenada, Grenadines, Guam, Japan, Hong Kong, Iceland, Jordan, Nepal, Nicaragua, Oman, Poland, Protugal, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Samoa, Seychelles, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK, USA, USSR, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and the UN.

III. Research question:

Viewed from within the context of the ongoing NIIO discussion, a question of great interest is: now that Americans have greater access to views from around the world, presented from the point of the view of non-western journalists, what impact does this have on Americans' view of the world? More precisely, if Americans consume news presented in the manner supported or even initiated by the proponents of the NIIO, what difference does it make? Will Americans be more inclined to support the development efforts of developing nations? Etc. (Clearly, many other questions beg for attention: What kinds of stories are being submitted? Why are many nations not participating? Do countries receiving the "World Report" use it? If so, how? Several of these questions are being addressed in a study of "World Report" content by researchers at Ohio University.)

Experimental Design

The researcher "constructed" a thirty minute segment of CNN "World Report" by editing the first story from the most recent (at that time) program to the second story from the previous program to the third story from the program before that, etc. Thirty minutes was selected as the total length of the sample primarily because Americans are accustomed to getting TV news in half-hour chunks of time.

For the sample, the researcher selected an undergraduate class (Journalism 105) at Ohio University, comprised of about eighty-five college sophomores and juniors. The control group

responded to a series of assertions prior to viewing the constructed version of CNN's "World Report," while the experiment group viewed the stories first, then reponded to the same assertions. Again, the question was, would the responses to the assertions by students in the two groups reflect similar "world views"? Would viewing news from around the world, presented from the perspective of non-western journalists, have any effect on a viewer's world view?

The researcher presented nine assertions to each respondent (these are part of the questionnaire attached to the end of this paper). Each assertion, to one degree or another, reflects a potential world view. The extent to which a person agrees or disagrees (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) with each assertion is taken to be a reflection of the individual respondent's world view. The assertions are:

1. The U.S. government should cut economic aid to developing countries to reduce the federal budget deficit.

Many developing nations are dependent on economic aid from western nations, and the threat of cutbacks (owing to American budgetary and political pressures) to such aid is a disturbing fact of life for non-western nations. If one assumes that the opinion of the American public is important in the development of U.S. policy, then whatever impact on public opinion that viewing news from the non-western perspective would have is of interest to the researcher (and presumably to government leaders in the non-western world).

2. Developing countries should have to pay back the money they borrowed from American banks.

Such assertions strike at the heart of many developing nation's economic woes. Skyrocketing interest rates and plummeting oil prices have made the repayment of enormous bank loans a burden of staggering proportion. Again, if public opinion in America is perceived to have a role in shaping policy on such issues, the impact of viewing news from the non-western perspective is of great interest.

3. The U.S. government should stop the import of products from foreign countries to improve the U.S. trade deficit.

The only hope for economic development in many nations appears to be in the venue of international trade. An American public, primed on a Gephardtian philosophy of tariffs on imports from countries where wages are far below American standards, may be ready to support restrictions on trade to curtail a further decline in the U.S. trade deficit.

4. People in developing countries should not expect to have the same kind of lifestyle as people in the United States.

As the language of the assertion suggests, this item gets at the heart of the issue of "expectations." Do Americans think people in developing countries have any right to expect what Americans have? If not, this might suggests a kind of "close-the-door-behind-you" view of economic prosperity. Again, how seeing news from a non-western perspective might influence a viewer's opinion on this question is of great interest.

5. The Soviet Union is an evil empire.

This item is included to detect strong views in respondents' political outlook vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Soviet media make regular contributions to "World Report." The question is, does it make any difference (in their view of the Soviets) whether Americans view news from a non-western perspective?

6. Government officials in developing countries are prone to be corrupt.

One of the principal charges in the NIIO position is that western media only show stories on the "bad apples," or, in this case, corrupt government officials. Presumably, news presented from a non-western perspective would make more of an effort to show the work of honest, hard-working politicians and bureaucrats from developing nations. Such stories might affect how Americans perceive government leaders (the potential recipients of American aid), and thus on American support of foreign aid programs

7. People in developing countries are suppressed by their government.

This item taps a similar vein as item 6.

8. The U.S. is the most important country in the world.

Here, respondents simply are asked to rank the position, in terms of respondents might interpret the notion of "importance," of the United States versus the rest of the world.

9. Most developing countries are run by dictators.

This item is similar to items 6 and 7.

A second set of questions asked respondents to indicate their age, year in school, how often they viewed local TV news, network news, read local, regional and national newspapers, news magazines, etc. The purpose of these questions was to ascertain whether the two groups were similar in age, media usage, etc. There were no significant differences in the responses to any of these items, indicating that the two samples come from similar populations. Most of the respondents for each sample were college sophomores and juniors (24 of 26 in one group, 20 of 26 in the other), between the ages and 19 and 21 (24 of 26 in one group, 22 of 26 in the other), and shared similar media consumption habits (in terms of the number of days in the previous week they had watched TV news, read a newspaper or news magazine, etc.).

IV. Analysis/Findings.

A review of the nine assertions that were presented to the respondents in each group will reveal that each was worded in such a way that agreement (1 or 2) would suggest a kind of "us-against-them" world view, and disagreement (4 or 5) would suggest a kind of "us-with-them" world view. Again, the question is, does viewing news from a non-western perspective engender an "us-with-them" world view? Any significant difference in the way the two groups responded to the assertions would be taken to indicate that viewing even a thirty minute segment of such material CAN have the effect of altering one's world view. The researcher used the non-parametric sign test to analyze the data.

Respondents' "answers" to each assertion were arranged in "matched pairs" to yield the signs necessary for the analysis. A "plus" indicates that the response by an individual in the experimental group was "higher" (indicating less agreement with an assertion, or more disagrement with an assertion) than a person in the control group. Likewise, a "minus" indicates a person in the experiment group agrees more or disagrees less with an assertion than a person in the control group.

Hypotheses:

The null hypothesis is that watching CNN "World Report" has not effect on a person's world view; thus, one would expect to find roughly an equal number of (+) as (-). The alternate hypothesis is that there will be a significant difference in the number of (+) and (-).

H_0: $p = 0.50$

H_1: $p \neq 0.50$

Cases where both respondents in a matched pair have the same degree of agreement/disagreement are excluded.

Applying the "matched pair" method yields the following signs:

Table 1. Sign Test Results for Items 1 to 9 (the assertions)

ITEM:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
(+)	10	10	10	9	12	10	15	11	13
(-)	8	8	10	8	5	7	3	4	8

For all but item 3, there are more (+) than (-), suggesting that there is a consistent difference between the two groups' world views. To determine whether the differences are statistically significant, z scores were computed for each set of (+) and (-), with a 5% level of significance (the null hypothesis is rejected if z is less than -1.96 or greater than 1.96). The following z scores were computed:

Table 2. z scores for Items 1 to 9 (the assertions)

ITEM:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
z =	0.85	0.85	0.0	0.42	2.96	1.27	4.65	2.96	1.69

Discussion

Clearly, z scores for items 5, 7 and 8 indicate that, for the given level of significance, there is a statistically significant difference between the number of (+) and (-), and thus an important difference in how two groups responded to these particular assertions.

5. The Soviet Union is an evil empire.

As indicated, this item was included to detect respondents' views of Soviet Union. Clearly, those who viewed the tape before responding to the item agreed more with the assertion than did respondents who viewed the tape first.

7. People in developing countries are suppressed by their government.

While the researcher thought this item would tap a similar vein as item 6, respondents apparently felt otherwise.

Item 6 asserts: Government officials in developing countries are prone to be corrupt.

While item 7 asserts: People in developing countries are suppressed by their government.

There is some measure of difference in the responses to item 6 ($z = 1.27$), yet it is far less distinct than in the responses to item 7 ($z = 4.65$). Apparently, respondents who viewed the tape were not much more inclined to give government officials in developing countries an approving nod than were the respondents in the control group. On the other hand, the respondents who viewed the tape apparently saw little evidence of suppression in developing countries; indeed, they probably saw pictures of people living remarkably normal lives.

8. The U.S. is the most important country in the world.

When respondents who had viewed the tape were faced with this assertion, they were far less ready to place the United States at the center of the world than were the other respondents. Perhaps seeing "normal" life in other countries, in the form of news from the non-western perspective, gives one an altogether different opinion of how "important" the U.S. is. There's a kind of appreciation of the world implicit in disagreement with this assertion.

Other Findings

With somewhat less assurance, a few other findings can be suggested from the data. First, respondents who viewed the tape were less inclined to view government leaders in the developing world as dictators (item 9) who were corrupt (item 6). Further-

more, those who viewed the tape were somewhat less in favor of cutting economic aid to developing countries (item 1), and somewhat less in favor of forcing developing countries to pay back the money they borrowed from American banks (item 2). Further study with larger sample groups might yield more definitive results on these items. Where clearly there is no difference between the respondents who viewed the tape and those who did not are in the areas of the U.S. trade deficit (item 3), and how they view the expectations of people in the developing world (item 4).

V. Conclusions.

As with many such studies, it is difficult to transfer findings onto the general public. About all that can be said with any assurance is that if a particular population of college sophomores and juniors viewed a thirty minute tape of items from "World Report," their view of the world might change in a number of respects. But while limited, the findings are not insignificant. Clearly, seeing a different kind of news story can have a powerful effect on people's views of the world. The views that appear most ready to crumble when an alternative view is presented are in the area of basic perceptions. The Soviets seem a little less evil, leaders of developing countries seem less suppressive, the U.S. seems a little less at the center of the universe, etc. But when respondents who viewed the tape were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed/disagreed to "action" oriented assertions, they were less inclined to let the non-western news stories have much effect.

Clearly, world views might change more dramatically if the experimental group was exposed to more than a single thirty minute segment of CNN "World Report," or any other type of non-western news material for that matter. This study, however, suggests that even a brief encounter with news from a non-western perspective can have a dramatic effect on a person's world view.

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SIDE A

Please answer the following questions.

What is your age? 15-18 19-22 23-26 27-30 30+

What is you major? _____

What is your nationality? _____

What year in school? 7-8 9-12 F So J Se Grad

How many days last week did you view a local TV news program?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How many days last week did you view a network TV news program? (e.g., ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour, etc.)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How many days last week did you read a local newspaper?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How many days last week did you read a regional newspaper?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How many days last week did you read a national newspaper (other than USA Today)? (e.g., New York Times, Washington Post, Wall St. Journal, Christian Science Monitor, etc.)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How many days last week did you read USA Today?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Did you read a news magazine (Time, Newsweek, etc.) last week?

yes no

Did you view a weekend news talk show ("This Week with David Brinkley," "Washington Week in Review," etc.)?

yes no

SIDE B

Circle the appropriate number that indicates how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (3=no opinion):

1. The U.S. government should cut economic aid to developing countries to reduce the federal budget deficit.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

2. Developing countries should have to pay back the money they borrowed from American banks.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

3. The U.S. government should stop the import of products from foreign countries to improve the U.S. trade deficit.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

4. People in developing countries should not expect to have the same kind of lifestyle as people in the United States.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

5. The Soviet Union is an evil empire.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

6. Government officials in developing countries are prone to be corrupt.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

7. People in developing countries are suppressed by their governments.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

8. The U.S. is the most important country in the world.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree

9. Most developing countries are run by dictators.

strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree